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AN EDITOR VIEWS BUREAUCRACY, PART II

The average politician intensely dislikes the crusading newspaper. He puts all the degradation of the worst man sneer into the word "crusader," which he plasters every opportunity upon the newspaper editor who spends more than passing interest in the improvement of the people's government or in the upgrading of human

The dictionary gives the following definition for the word "crusade":

Mark of the cross. Any of the military expeditions undertaken by the Christians of Europe in the 11th, 12th and the 13th centuries for the recovery of the Holy Land from the Mohammedans; any war carried on under papal sanction; in general, any aggressive movement or advancement of an idea or cause, or against a public evil.

There is nothing whatsoever low in this definition, the politician, with his eye usually on the next election, has connoted the meaning of "crusade" as something far below a cockroach's foot and has caused many newspapers not only to shy away from the word but also to avoid anything that resembles a fight in behalf of a cause or against a public evil. Even in our national journalistic awards, we use the term "public service," which may be a better description. Yet I am one newspaper editor who sees nothing disgraceful in the word "crusade."

'Crusade' With Pride

Several years ago we received a pitiful letter from a ten-year-old boy, a patient in the polio ward of Tampa Municipal Hospital, which told in the school-boy handling of the lack of the proper equipment for his treatment. I immediately sent a staffer into the polio ward, confirmed the fact that equipment was badly needed to the extent of \$10,000, and then ran the boy's story on our Page 1 with a plea to our readers for the \$10,000. Within three days we had the \$10,000 and it took us a week to persuade our readers to cease their contributions. We wound up with \$32,000 in the fund, bought the \$10,000 in essential polio equipment and in the summer of 1958, upon completion of the new hospital building, we spent the remaining \$22,000 for warm water pipes for the use of polio and other victims with ailing limbs.

I called this a "crusade" with great pride. And I did not refrain from pointing out that Tampa Municipal Hospital is under the care of our city politicians and didn't they provide the proper equipment for the

polio ward? Could it be that there are no votes in the next election in this kind of public service?

Politicians Should Crusade

There were also the three cases within a week wherein Tampa taxicab drivers committed rape. I put five reporters checking the records of the 683 men who had been given cab-driving permits by the City of Tampa. We then reported that 118 of them were convicted criminals who had served time for such offenses as murder, rape and armed robbery. The results were immediate. The City Taxicab Commission quickly adopted a new regulation barring ex-convicts from obtaining city permits as drivers.

But why was a newspaper "crusade" necessary to protect women passengers from rape in taxicabs? Let the politicians who condemn newspaper crusading answer this.

Some Fights Are Lost

We do not, of course, win all of our "crusades." Fresh water is an essential of booming industry, and this, of course, became a prime problem as national industry began moving into Florida in the post-war years. In 1954, we launched a crusade against the contamination of our streams and lakes. In stories and pictures, we told how the new industrial plants were pumping their refuse into our fresh water, which not only ruined the fishing but also reduced the amount of that fresh water available for new industry. I even made a speech at the University of Florida, outlined the dangers of the contamination and dumped the problem into the laps of our state politicians.

Under the pressure of this crusade, a reasonable law, which would regulate the dumping of refuse into streams and lakes, was introduced in the 1955 legislature. But by the time the lobbyists got through with the Legislators and the Legislators got through with amending the law, it was no law at all. And so I ask Florida's politicians, where was the public service in this public matter?

More Political Monkeyshines

We lost another crusade in the Legislature, or rather, I should say that the Florida public lost. Cost of public welfare is one of the greater state drains on the taxpayers' dollars and it is an ever-growing drain, regardless of whether our economy goes up or down. Two years ago I assigned a couple of staffers to look into welfare

and their stories, heavily documented with exact individual cases, showed (1) that many elderly people were on the welfare rolls even though they owned considerable property, and (2) many elderly people were receiving pensions even though their children were comparatively wealthy.

A bill calling for a state lien on the pension recipient's property and for the responsibility of children for their aging parents was introduced in the 1957 Legislature, but it went the way of many such bills for the public welfare. Most of our documentary cases were in the small counties, which are largely unpatrolled by daily newspapers, and it was the small county representatives and senators who put the finishing touches to it. Throughout our nation, you will find the small counties dominating almost all of our Legislatures and our small county politicians take the attitude that it is the inherent duty of the taxpayers in the large counties to assume all financial responsibility for the political monkeyshines in the small counties.

Speed Traps

We scored a victory in one of our crusades in South Florida and then subsequently reversed the field and took the other side in a similar controversy in Central Florida. Some years ago I received a letter from a businessman in Michigan, who informed me that, while he had enjoyed his winter in Florida, he was burned to a crisp because he had been arrested at Palmetto, a large bond taken from him and his case put on the court docket so far into the future that he couldn't possibly run down from Michigan to fight it. His bond, far more than the ordinary speeding fine, automatically was forfeited when he didn't appear in court.

A *Tribune* staffer dug into the city court records at Palmetto and we uncovered what truly was a speed trap, with our winter visitors as the victims. It was based on Florida's ancient and out-of-date fee system, wherein the constable and city officers got their salaries on the basis of the amount of fees they piled up in court. At the same time, the records showed that the city was using these bonds plucked from their winter visitors to pay part of their municipal bills. Our series of stories, played on Page 1 put a quick end to this evil.

A few months later the AAA issued a report accusing two communities in Levy and Lake counties of preying on Tampa motorists. We sent a staffer to each community and they pored over the records, interviewed everybody concerned and made personal checks of the traffic. They found the trouble to be Cadillacs and Lincolns racing through the communities at 80 and 90 miles an hour in utter disregard of the law. Whereupon, we upheld, through factual stories, the law officers of the two communities.

'Political Eunuchs of the Civil Service'

We ran head on into what Max Lerner calls "the political eunuchs of the civil service" in his book, *America as a Civilization*, in one of our crusades. Heeding the growing protests of Tampa householders that they were not getting the proper mail delivery service, we checked into the postoffice and got little satisfaction. America moved into civil service to protect the routine functions of government from politics and to give the great mass of

routine government workers some stability. But always such widespread protection, you pay a penalty, and the penalty of governmental civil service is a marked lack of initiative and enterprise.

Tampa postal workers, of course, weren't concerned over the protests, simply because they were doing their routine jobs, they couldn't be fired and they were taking their orders, not from the taxpayers who paid their salaries, but from higher up in the hierarchy of the federal bureaucracy. So we keyed our campaign to our congressmen and senators, and several of our staffers did a series of stories based on personal interviews by names of Tampa householders in various sections of our city. It paid off immediately; orders came down from on high; 50 postmen were added, and the mail delivery squawks ceased.

Fraud in Unemployment Compensation

Some crusades explode into the spectacular sensation; others drudge on through the months and sometimes years. On the basis of continuous protests over the growing high costs from Florida's businessmen, the *Tribune* ran a series of 12 stories on unemployment compensation paid by the State of Florida. On the day the seventh story appeared, the state office at Tallahassee announced a general investigation. That investigation revealed countless cases of fraud in all the bigger cities of the state. The subsequent clean-up sharply reduced the number of unemployment claims paid by the state and thus saved considerable money for Florida's employers.

Quick Action

Equally sensational was the *Tribune's* crusade against the faulty construction of the \$4,500,000 state tuberculosis hospital in Tampa. We dedicated the beautiful building, which looked out over Hillsborough Bay, with much political pomp and glory in 1951. One year later we sent a staff writer and a photographer through the place. What they found created a scandal. Our stories and pictures of the cracks and collapses in that \$4,500,000 pile of the Florida taxpayers' dollars resulted in a sensational investigation. One man went to jail and the state sued the contractors for repairs.

The crusade with the quickest result which we ever undertook involved an old negro in the Hernando County jail at Brooksville. This Negro had been arrested some six months before as a material witness in a murder case. But since he was a good worker and had a sunny disposition, the sheriff conveniently forgot about his civil liberties and used him on various jobs in and about the county jail. We dug into the case and printed the story on our Page 1. The *Tribune* is delivered in the morning about 6 o'clock in Hernando County. At 7 o'clock that day, the doors of the county jail clanged open and the old negro was turned back into freedom.

Faulty Meat Inspection

Our crusade on meat took considerably longer. We sent our staffers peering into the butcher shops of the grocery stores throughout the community, paying particular attention to the government stamp on the meat. Our subsequent series of stories clearly showed that the Florida housewives were being gypped in quality of

eat they bought through faulty government inspection. The direct result was a new law adopted by the Legislature tightening up state inspection of meat. But one year later, *Tribune* staffers again checked the meat in the stores, again found faulty inspection, and our new series of stories produced drastic changes by the State Livestock Sanitary Board in behalf of Florida's housewives.

Pardon Board 'Fixers'

On the opposite end of the clock is the *Tribune's* 2-year crusade against the loose operations of the Florida State Pardon Board. Back in 1936, we ripped the cover off a pardon racket wherein certain "fixers," in exchange for dollars, could obtain the release of almost any criminal from prison. Our expose put an end to this particular evil, but it did not by any means sweep political privilege out of the issuance of pardons by the pardon board, which is made up of the Governor and cabinet members, all elected officials.

Over the 22 years, every administration has had its pardon scandal wherein some convicted criminal, through political privilege, has escaped the penalty. The latest came in February 1958, and involved a Tampa bondsman, convicted in a burglary case. The *Tribune* ran a new series of stories, reciting a lot of Florida's old pardon scandals. But a number of prominent Tampa citizens wrote letters to the Governor in behalf of the bail bondsman, and the pardon board yielded to the pressure.

Business and Privacy

We have done a number of crusades involving business but I would warn the journalism beginner to tread easy in this field. There is the legal matter of privacy involved and experienced know-how is essential. A safe policy is to look into business research only when the taxpayers, in the form of government, itself, are directly involved and where the business affects the living of a whole community. And always stick closely to the records.

Businessmen sometimes act like politicians. In the late spring of 1958, one of our staffers looked into the state inspection of fertilizer to ascertain if Florida's farmers were getting an even break. Within 24 hours, the manager of the plant of a national fertilizer company threatened to get my staffer's job. And in the next few days, my staffer's telephone rang on the hour every hour during the night, to upset him nervously, and one of the company's cars, with a leering, shouting driver parked in front of his home during the daytime. But we went right ahead and printed our story, which showed that this particular company had the worst record in the state inspection of fertilizer.

Tampa's principal industry for many years was the manufacture of hand-made cigars. Early in the history of the industry, old Samuel Gompers, a cigarmaker himself, and his American Federation of Labor got an iron-clad grip on Tampa. The march of machinery vitally affected the entire cigar industry, but Tampa's cigar unions fought it tooth and toenail. The result, of course, was that Tampa's hand-made industry began to lose ground to the machine-producing cigar plants in the east and our cigar payrolls began to dip.

So a team of *Tribune* staffers went to work and their

series of factual stories brought out graphically (1) the responsibility of the entire community to this industry with a \$10,000,000 payroll affecting 25,000 persons; (2) the need for modernization, and (3) the need for a close study of competing operations by operators and workers alike. Direct result of the series was the creation of a promotion campaign for the first time by Tampa's cigar manufacturers and a warm and cooperative reception by our community.

A Best-Seller Booklet

Tampa is the very heart of Florida's \$600,000,000 citrus industry. For years the small citrus grower had complained long and loudly that the selling price of his fruit was being squeezed below cost. A *Tribune* staffer spent months studying the industry. Then he wrote a series of Page 1 stories that told the whole story of the industry. Overnight the series became a best-seller in Florida's citrus country. As a public service, the *Tribune* reprinted the stories in a booklet and, upon request, distributed thousands. Immediate upshot of this project was that 7,000 Florida growers, packers, shippers and processors organized into a gigantic cooperative, the Florida Citrus Mutual, to keep a restraining finger upon the proper stabilization of prices.

We did the same thing in the matter of pine seedlings. A *Tribune* staffer spent weeks studying Florida's lumbering industry and his series of Page 1 stories pointed up the great need of replenishing Florida's rapidly disappearing pine forests. Again public demand caused the *Tribune* to go to the expense of reprinting the series in a booklet. One Central Florida bank president distributed hundreds of these booklets to his customers. Today you will find thousands upon thousands of acres of new pine in Florida.

Victims of Ill Fortune

When a newspaper gets the reputation for crusading, it receives many pleas for help from those citizens who are victims of ill fortune. This presents a problem since the average newspaper does not have the trained personnel to ascertain if the plea is genuine. The best procedure is to send the pleader to a social welfare agency and then, if the professional welfare workers give him their stamp of approval, the newspaper can appeal for public aid.

But there is danger in even the best of these individual cases. Once, on a Christmas Eve, the home of a Tampa war veteran, who had a houseful of children, burned to the ground. At the instigation of sympathetic neighbors, the *Tribune* asked the public for help. Overnight warm-hearted citizens, perhaps moved by the Christmas spirit, contributed enough money for a new home. But a week after the new house was erected, the war veteran sold it for a neat profit and departed for parts unknown.

On the other hand, a totally disabled war veteran in DeLand appealed to the *Tribune* for help in the run-around being given him by the Veterans Administration in the faulty construction of his home. A *Tribune* staffer inspected the home and found that portions of the construction, including the roof did not meet the specifications of either the contractor or the VA. His stories brought VA intervention on the run and the veteran's home was satisfactorily completed.

Likewise, a crusading daily newspaper receives many pleas from citizens over the mismanagement of government in the smaller communities. I never turn down such an appeal simply because if I did, where could the complaining citizen go? In such situations, and there are many throughout the United States, public opinion is the final court of appeal and if a newspaper turns a deaf ear, then it is false to the great tradition of American freedom of the press.

It has been my experience over the years that, once elected to office, the small community politician regards his elevation in society as a short cut to special privilege. Early America was famous for its open town meetings, but such is not the case today. Much of the small town political privilege is ladled out in secret meetings, and the weekly and small daily through the pressure of limited advertising and of small town privilege, usually is in no position to fight this.

Some months ago there came to the *Tribune* a dignified old gentleman of 85 who laid before us a tale of dire mismanagement of government in his rural county. I sent a veteran reporter to the county and, after a week's research, he reported back (1) that the county's government was honest and above-board; (2) that young men had assumed control and were seeking to modernize the county government; and (3) that the old gentleman had served 50 years on the county commission and his complaints were based purely on resentment of being pushed out of his position of special privilege by old Father Time. We, of course, wrote nothing, even though the old gentleman persisted in pestering us for weeks and once sent a batch of watermelons to our office.

In Answer to Citizens' Pleas

But, in answer to citizens' pleas, we have written many millions of words over the years about the mismanagement of small town government in Florida. And likewise, we have done research and printed many a series of stories in behalf of community improvement in the small towns in our Florida area. Our staffers roamed far and wide in their successful campaigns for school bond issues in eight counties surrounding Tampa, and they dug deeply into tax problems, in answer to outspoken opposition from the wealthy, in winning new sewer systems for the citizens of Mulberry, Wauchula and Inverness.

At Arcadia, a *Tribune* staffer wrote how the members of the city council, certain favored city employes and privileged businessmen received free driveways and free gasoline, all paid for by the taxpayers, and how the city's public works superintendent presented concrete benches as Christmas presents to the members of the city council. At Sebring, a staff-written series of stories related how equipment of the city-owned air terminal had dribbled away into the unknown. And at Howey-in-the-Hills, another *Tribune* expose reported to Lake County's taxpayers how one of their county commissioners was receiving special pay to pave that town's streets with the county's equipment.

Another *Tribune* staffer's reports of a widespread moonshine business in Lake City resulted in a big raid by state beverage department agents, and a series of stories on the waste of taxpayers' money in the ancient ward

system of building roads in Hendry County was climaxed by a clean-up and a return to good government. At Zephyrhills, we exposed a neat little municipal racket wherein city officials sold their land to the city just before the city tax rolls were made up and bought it back afterwards, thus escaping taxation. The citizens of Zephyrhills reacted by tossing out the erring public servants in the next election. We scored another election victory in Mulberry where the taxpayers, in answer to our stories, threw out an antiquated city government and installed a city manager.

School Boards

For some strange reason, the minute the average citizen of a small community is elected to his school board, he assumes that the education of the children of the community and all business thereof belong to him as his private domain. Thus, much of the business of the average small town school board is conducted in secrecy, not only in Florida but throughout the United States. We ran head-on into this secrecy at Dunnellon and Bonita Springs, and our factual stories of the bitter behind-the-scene fights between principals, teachers and parents cleared the atmosphere and stirred the taxpayers into positive action.

The same secrecy is largely prevalent in small town government and we encountered it in a big way at Auburndale. There, for many years, the city council had doled out special privileges in buildings, utilities and personnel. Our campaign against this was only partially successful simply because it is difficult to achieve an overnight cure in a long-time cancerous government growth.

Newspaper Is Integral Part of Community

We were the only newspaper to give Florida taxpayers a full account of developments in the fight between the City the Gainesville and the University of Florida over a 1905 contract which calls for the city to give free water to the University. And in the middle of this a *Tribune* story disclosed that the University had used funds, specially appropriated for a tank to increase campus water pressure, to complete the Century Tower, while buying only a small pump for the pressure.

Thus, regardless of the Florida politicians' dim view of crusading, you can see that the Tampa *Tribune* has been an integral part over the years of the way of life in Florida.

Columbia, Missouri
April, 1959